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ABSTRACT

Although work, as a source of need satisfaction and self-esteem, is extremely important in our society, it has an increased meaning for people with disabilities because it permits them (and others) to perceive themselves as normal, competent citizens. This research studies the self-esteem of employees with developmental disabilities as measured by the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory. Thirty-five workers with varying degrees of developmental disabilities, who had been placed in competitive employment through the Focus Supportive Work program, were surveyed after 6 to 18 months on the job. A factor analysis revealed four sub-areas to the instrument labeled self-acceptance, assertiveness-anxiety, family, and social acceptance. Frequency distributions and chi-square analyses conducted on each sub-area for the client characteristics of male/female, age, degree of developmental disability, and work experience revealed no significant difference at the .05 level for each sub-area; but two characteristics evidenced a significant difference: (1) work experience in the sub-area of assertiveness; and (2) anxiety and male/female in the sub-area of family. An overall average of 90.7 percent of the respondents exhibited high self-esteem as reflected by the Self-Esteem Inventory indicating that a program which places, trains, and provides follow-up is of considerable value in finding jobs where persons with developmental disabilities can succeed, assisting them in satisfactorily performing the tasks, and enabling them to derive high self-esteem. (Author/LMO)

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# Self-Esteem and Employed Workers with Developmental Disabilities: A Pilot Study

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ABSTRACT

Although work, as a source of need satisfaction and self-esteem, is extremely important in our society, it has an increased meaning for people with disabilities because it permits them (and others) to perceive themselves as normal, competent citizens. This research studies the self-esteem of employees with developmental disabilities as measured by the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory. Thirty-five workers with varying degrees of developmental disabilities (IQ 45 to 84, and 36% with secondary disabilities) who had been placed in competitive employment through the Focus Supportive Work program were surveyed after 6 to 18 months on the job. A factor analysis revealed four sub-areas to the instrument labeled self-acceptance, assertiveness, anxiety, family, and social acceptance. Frequency distributions and chi-square analyses conducted on each sub-area for the client characteristics of male/female, age, degree of developmental disability, and work experience revealed no significant difference at the .05 level for each sub-area; but two characteristics evidenced a significant difference: work experience in the sub-area of assertiveness--anxiety and male/female in the sub-area of family. An overall average of 90.7% of the respondents exhibited high self-esteem as reflected by the Self-Esteem Inventory indicating that a program to place in jobs, train, and provide follow-up is of considerable value in finding jobs at which persons with developmental disabilities can succeed, assisting them in satisfactorily performing the tasks, and enabling them to derive high self-esteem.

The question almost always asked of strangers in casual conversation is "What is your job?" The answer usually creates in the mind of the inquirer an impression of the respondent's worth as an individual. Through work, people earn a place in their communities and develop a sense of accomplishment (Henderson and Bryan, 1984). As long ago as the second century, Galen believed that "Employment is nature's best physician, an essential to happiness." Roe, commenting on the hierarchy of needs of the more contemporary Abraham Maslow, states that an occupation is a symbol in our culture of adulthood, carrying a measure of esteem, and is therefore an extremely important source of need satisfaction (Roe, 1956). Through the period of the Industrial Revolution and into the Age of Automation, work has become relevant to the search for identity.

Work has an increased meaning for people with disabilities (Vash, 1981). Many employers have a negative stereotype of persons with disabilities and consequently expect less of them. This attitude may encourage people with disabilities to expect less of themselves and to lose self-esteem. If they (and others) are to see themselves as normal, competent citizens, they must be able to achieve the goal of working and the rewards of working.

An extensive literature review revealed no research concerning employment of individuals with developmental disabilities and self-esteem. However, some research exists on jobs, workers, and self-

esteem.

Korman defines self-esteem as a person's characteristic evaluation of himself as an individual; low self-esteem is characterized by a sense of personal inadequacy and an inability to achieve need satisfaction; high self-esteem is defined by a sense of personal adequacy and a sense of having achieved need satisfaction (Korman, 1967).

In a 1967 study, Korman found that a person with high self-esteem sees himself as more likely to meet the ability requirements of his occupation than does the person with low self-esteem. He also found the possibility that the individual with low self-esteem more readily accepts situations in which he does not think he will be adequate and in which he actually will tend not to be adequate. This attitude lowers his self-esteem even further (Korman, 1967).

A 1968 experiement by Korman showed that, for some people, task achievement is not a source of satisfaction nor is task failure a particular source of dissatisfaction. A task must also meet some apparent standard of "social desirability" before its achievement be satisfying. Korman also found that an individual's self-esteem is a function of the extent to which others think that individual is competent, need-satisfying, and able; and this perception is demonstrated by the kinds of behavior which others exhibit toward the individual (Korman, 1968).

Oregon's Living in the Community (LINC) program for chronic mental patients integrates productive activities with a comprehensive aftercare program. The LINC program emphasizes vocational rehabilitation and occupational activities through practical job skills training and community employment. The LINC staff provides continued and regular contact with the patient and the employer. Faulkner, Terrvilliger, and Cutler found that the development of the patient's productive skills increased the local community's acceptance of LINC patients and tremendously increased the patient's self-esteem (Faulkner, Terrvilliger, and Cutler, 1983).

## Hypothesis

To investigate self-esteem and employed workers with developmental disabilities, the following hypothesis was postulated:

Subjects with developmental disabilities placed in competitive employment will demonstrate characteristics of high self-esteem.

## Methodology

The subjects surveyed in this study were 28 males and 7 females, aged 17 to 38, with moderate to severe developmental disabilities, from an available population of clients placed in competitive employment through the Focus Supportive Work Program. The subjects' IQ's ranged from 45 to 84. Of this group, 36% also had secondary disabilities. The length of employment at the time of the survey ranged from 6 months to 18 months. Among the subjects,

31% had no prior work experience, 16% had prior work experience, and 43% had sheltered work experience. Because of the subjects' low reading abilitities, as reflected by the General Aptitude Test Battery (GATB), the self-esteem inventory was administered orally to each subject.

Instrument

The Self-Esteem Inventory, the instrument used for this study, consists of 13 items selected from Coopersmith's longer form of 25 items (Coopersmith, 1967). The smaller number was selected because of its oral administration.

The original pool of items, classified by five psychologists as indicative of high and low esteem, was drawn from Rogers and Dymond and original research (Rogers and Dymond, 1954). The 50 items selected on rational grounds were reduced to 25 from an item analysis of the responses to the longer form. The shorter form correlated over .95 with the longer form (Coopersmith, 1967).

Taylor and Reitz found a .90 split-half reliability for the long form (Taylor and Reitz, 1968). No data are available for this shorter form, but it is probably less stable because of its length.

Robinson and Shaver conducted two factor analyses on the longer form (Robinson and Shaver, 1973), and four factors emerged labeled as "self-derogation," "leadership-popularity," "family-parents," and "assertiveness-anxiety." For the present study these factors were

relabeled "self-acceptance" (items 1, 2, 7, 13), "social acceptance" (items 5, 10), "family" (items 6, 9), and "assertivenes-anxiety" (items 3, 4, 8, 11, 12). The responses to items were rated positive and negative, with a positive response scored as 2 and a negative response scored as 1.

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Insert Table 1 about here

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Results

Frequency distributions and chi-square analyses were conducted on each sub-area for the client characteristics of male/female, age, degree of developmental disability, work experience (no prior experience, prior experience, sheltered work experience), type of job (service or semi-skilled), and full-time vs. part-time work. Chi-square analyses were also performed on each sub-area (self-acceptance, assertiveness-anxiety, family, social acceptance).

While no significant difference at the .05 level was found for each sub-area, two categories within sub-areas showed a significant difference.

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Insert Table 2 about here

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The chi-square on the characteristic of client work experience in the sub-area of assertiveness-anxiety ($X^2_{(3)} = 13.31$, $p < .05$) evidenced that 44% of workers with prior work experience and 13% of workers

with sheltered work experience demonstrated low self-esteem.

Insert Table 3 about here

A chi-square on the characteristic of male/female in the sub-area of family ($X^2_{(2)}=9.54$, $p<.05$) revealed that 29% of female employees demonstrated low self-esteem in the perceived degree of understanding and expectations from the family while males evidenced high self-esteem within the family.

Insert Table 4 about here

The frequency distributions performed on the sub-areas reflected positive responses of the subjects as follows: 91.5% in the sub-area of self-acceptance, 82.9% in the sub-area of assertiveness-anxiety, 94.3% in the sub-area of family, and 94.3% in the sub-area social-acceptance. Thus, an average of 90.7% of the respondents exhibited high self-esteem as reflected by the Self-Esteem Inventory.

## Discussion

This research studied the self-esteem of employees with developmental disabilities as measured by the Self-Esteem Inventory. The Focus Supportive Work staff placed and trained 35 persons with developmental disabilities in full or part-time community jobs. All were still working and had held these jobs for 6-18 months. The

findings reflected that 90.7% of these workers exhibited high self-esteem in all four sub-areas: self-acceptance, assertiveness-anxiety, family, and social-acceptance. Because the ability to work and to hold a job is important in our society, placement in a job, training, and follow-up for persons with developmental disabilities often results in a tremendous increase in their self-esteem.

Chi-square analyses on worker characteristics revealed two areas of low self-esteem: 45% of the clients who had prior work experience sustained low self-esteem in the sub-area of assertiveness-anxiety, and females showed low self-esteem in the sub-area of family.

Clients who had previously held jobs before entering the Focus Supportive Work program may have been terminated from these jobs for unsatisfactory performance or may have encountered some unpleasant experiences with co-workers and/or employers because no supportive training or follow-up was available to them. Thus, experiences on the prior job may account for anxiety on the present job even though the worker may be performing satisfactorily.

The finding that males demonstrated high self-esteem and females low self-esteem in the perceived degree of understanding and expectations from the family may be attributed to the fact that expectations are higher in our society for males than for females, especially in the lower socio-economic strata (O'Kelly, 1980). Male

workers may receive more positive reinforcement from their females for maintaining employment than do female workers. Families may have lower expectations of females with developmental disabilities and be more protective of them than they are of the males.

A survey by the Department of Labor in 1973 suggested that the most satisfied workers were those who had not gone beyond the eighth grade and those who had done graduate work (Rietz, 1977). The general high self-esteem reflected by the survey of workers with developmental disabilities may be due, in part, to their low expectations for types of employment and earnings. Workers with developmental disabilities, therefore, may receive high self-esteem from repetitive work because they perform at a level at which they can function well.

A program to place in employment, train, and provide follow-up seems to be of considerable value in finding jobs at which persons with developmental disabilities can succeed, assisting them in satisfactorily performing the tasks, and enabling them to derive high self-esteem.

The researchers plan further study of self-esteem in employees with developmental disabilities by utilizing the longer form of the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory as a pre-/post-test of clients entering the Supportive Work program and placed in competitive employment.

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TABLE 1

SELF-ESTEEM INVENTORY

| Circle One | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Agree<br>2. Disagree | 1. | If often wish I were someone else. |
| 1. Agree<br>2. Disagree | 2. | There are lots of things about myself I'd change if I could. |
| 1. Disagree<br>2. Agree | 3. | I can make up my mind without too much trouble. |
| 1. Agree<br>2. Disagree | 4. | It takes me a long time to get used to anything new. |
| 1. Disagree<br>2. Agree | 5. | I'm popular with people my own age. |
| 1. Agree<br>2. Disagree | 6. | My family expects too much from me. |
| 1. Agree<br>2. Disagree | 7. | I have a low opinion of myself. |
| 1. Agree<br>2. Disagree | 8. | I often feel upset about the work that I do. |
| 1. Disagree<br>2. Agree | 9. | My family understands me. |
| 1. Agree<br>2. Disagree | 10. | Most people are better liked than I am. |
| 1. Agree<br>2. Disagree | 11. | I often get discouraged at what I am doing. |
| 1. Disagree<br>2. Agree | 12. | Things don't usually bother me. |
| 1. Agree<br>2. Disagree | 13. | I cannot be depended upon. |

TABLE 2

Sub-area of Self-Esteem Measurement of

Developmental Disabled Workers (N=35)

| | Self Acceptance | Assertiveness-Anxiety | Family | Social Acceptance |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Observed Positive Responses | 32 | 29 | 33 | 33 |
| Expected Positive Responses | 35 | 35 | 35 | 35 |
| | $X^2_{(2)}$=.2571 | $X^2_{(3)}$=1.028 | $X^2_{(3)}$=.114 | $X^2_{(3)}$=.114 |

COMPOSITE $X^2$=1.505

TABLE 3

Self-Esteem Measurement of Assertiveness-Anxiety

by Subject's Work Experience (N=35) ($X^2_{(2)}$=13.31, p.<.05)

| | No Prior Work Experience | Prior Work Experience | Sheltered Workshop Experience |
|---|---|---|---|
| Observed Positive Responses | 11 | 5 | 13 |
| Expected Positive Responses | 11 | 9 | 15 |

TABLE 4

Self-Esteem Measurement of Family Understanding/Expectation:

Male vs. Female (N=33) ($X^2_{\omega}$ =9.537,p.<.05)

| | MALE | FEMALE |
|---|---|---|
| Observed Positive Responses | 28 | 5 |
| Expected Positive Responses | 28 | 7 |